

# C e d a r   R i v e r   C o u n c i l

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July 11, 2019

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor of Washington  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

We, the Cedar River Council (CRC), are writing on behalf of a critical natural resource. The CRC is an advisory group recognized by the King County Council for the purpose of advocating for the health of the Cedar River Basin. For 22 years, the CRC has worked with stakeholders within the Cedar River Basin to learn, listen, and advocate for the health, safety, and various uses of the system, including its fish.

The Cedar River is valued not only for the water it provides King County but also for its recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and scenery. Many dollars have been spent to improve fish habitat, build a hatchery, and reduce flooding with the expansion of floodplain systems which also function as fish refuge and rearing habitat. However, this work may be for nothing if action is not taken soon to resolve the critical issue of the Cedar River Basin's diminishing population of fish and their returns.

For the past two years the CRC has held its Annual Fish Report Meeting, the most recent on April 23, 2019. At these meetings CRC members and stakeholders learn of the status of the Cedar River Basin's fish populations. Last year the news was concerning, but this year the news is devastating. Attached to this letter, please find a data sheet that highlights deteriorating conditions for sockeye and other salmonid species in the Cedar River Basin.

As more is learned about challenges that reduce fish returns and fry escapements, the CRC and public ask why approaches that seem practical to them are not being attempted to resolve these challenges. An answer appears to lie with a settlement agreement between Native American tribes, Seattle Public Utilities, and the State of Washington, which does not allow deviation from a prescriptive management of the hatchery and gathering of brood stock.

At the CRC's April 23 meeting, nearly all of the 90 councilmembers and citizens/stakeholders present voted to support continuing attempts to save the Cedar River's fish runs, increase use of the hatchery, and provide policy flexibility to allow for new, innovative ways to rescue these threatened fish.

The CRC believes corrective actions should be taken quickly to allow experts to evaluate their effectiveness. Related issues, such as juvenile fish predation in Lake Washington and rising water temperatures in Lake Washington's Ship Canal, will take further time and funds to resolve.

The Honorable Jay Inslee

July 1, 2019

Page 2

The CRC asks the parties in the aforementioned settlement agreement to acknowledge that changes can and should be made to save the diminishing Cedar River sockeye population; these concerns are not fully beyond their control. These actions should help the sockeye, and will likely benefit other species as well. As climate change worsens, waters are expected to become even warmer, which will further degrade the situation. An action plan is needed to address these concerns, which will require WDFW to act as lead agency to bring all the partners together.

The urgency in acting to preserve this critical resource cannot be overstated. Salmon are not only crucial to local Native American tribes, but are an icon of the Puget Sound region and, most importantly, a resource that should be available for native wildlife, including the threatened orca population. Great investments have been made to improve habitat and hatchery operations, as well as create public awareness, but now it's time to try other simple, cost-effective ideas.

The Cedar River Council requests the following:

- Please direct WDFW to bring the appropriate parties together to address this issue with an expectation of an immediate action plan, with estimated costs, so that this plan can be funded and implemented.
- A meeting between you and CRC leadership to discuss this urgent natural resource issue as soon as possible.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this letter.

Thank you,



Max Prinsen  
Chair, Cedar River Council

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Jenny Durkan, Mayor of Seattle  
Isabel Tinoco, Fisheries Director, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe  
Mami Hara, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer, Seattle Public Utilities  
Christie True, Director, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
Kelly Susewind, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Colonel Mark A. Geraldi, Commander, US Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District  
Larry Carpenter, WDFW Commission Chair